

Fall 2012

Volume 26, Issue 4

# Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

# 2012 Annual Report

The year 2012 marks 40 years since Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) were established to protect our natural resources. This system for managing natural resources through locally elected officials is unique to Nebraska.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced, and the Nebraska Legislature enacted Legislative Bill (LB) 1357, to combine 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts. The NRDs' boundaries were organized based on Nebraska's major river basins, which allows for management practices to be applied more efficiently to similar topography. In 1989, the Middle Missouri NRD and the Papio NRD merged, becoming the Papio-Missouri NRD, which resulted in the current 23-NRD system.

Locally, Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD) was formed by consolidating the Phelps, Gosper, and Kearney County Soil and Water Conservation Districts. TBNRD is unusual because it encompasses portions of three different river basins: the Republican River Basin, the Platte River Basin, and the Little Blue River Basin.



Nebraska's  
Natural Resources Districts  
40 YEARS

Protecting Lives, Protecting Property & Protecting the Future Since 1972

## About Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

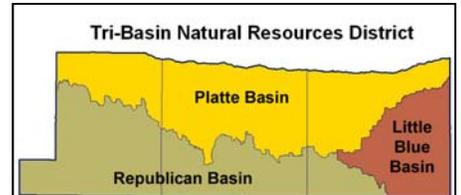
Tri-Basin Natural Resources District is the local government agency responsible for protection of natural resources in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties. There are 13 members of TBNRD's Board of Directors, 12 of whom are elected from designated sub-districts and one at-large member.

Tri-Basin NRD operates a district-wide Groundwater Management Area to protect groundwater quality and quantity. The NRD has regulated fertilizer application to protect groundwater quality since 1989. District staff have worked cooperatively with farmers and agronomists for more than 20 years to help improve the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of fertilizer application. These efforts have resulted in stable or declining nitrate-nitrogen levels in groundwater supplies throughout the district.

Tri-Basin NRD is also committed to sustaining groundwater supplies at levels equal to or greater than average groundwater levels in the period 1981-85. This commitment to protect existing groundwater supplies also protects Nebraska's credit for "imported water" in the Republican River Basin.

The NRD operates 25 miles of drainage ditches and associated works. We cooperate with local irrigation and drainage districts to maintain an additional 12 miles of drainageways.

We also serve our constituents in other ways. NRD personnel and our USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service colleagues survey and design terraces, dams and other conservation practices for local farmers. We monitor and map groundwater and surface water quality and quantity. We create and present informational and educational programs about natural resources for adults and schoolchildren.



## Vital Statistics

**Counties:** Gosper, Phelps, Kearney

### Elevation Above Mean Sea Level

High = 2,741 (Gosper County)  
Low = 1,985 (Kearney County)

### River Basins

Little Blue (25% of land area)  
Platte (35% of land area)  
Republican (40% of land area)

**Population:** 17,721 (2010 census)

**Property Valuation:** \$3,008,422,451  
(2012 property tax assessment)

**Land Area:** 1920 square miles  
(1,228,800 acres)

## Vision Statement

The vision (overall goal) for Tri-Basin NRD is to "**work cooperatively with District residents and others to promote good stewardship of land and water resources.**"

## Mission Statement

Tri-Basin NRD's mission is to "**manage, conserve and protect the District's land and water resources.**" This mission will be accomplished by protecting the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater, reducing potential for soil erosion and flooding, promoting agricultural best management practices, forestry and wildlife habitat preservation. These tasks can only be accomplished by working cooperatively with local residents and agencies of local, state and federal government.

## ***Protecting Our Groundwater***



Tri-Basin NRD continually monitors groundwater quantity throughout the district by measuring water levels in irrigation wells and dedicated observation wells. Tri-Basin has installed at least one dedicated observation well in each township in the district. Dataloggers in the observation wells automatically measure water levels at regular intervals. Regularly measuring our aquifers

helps Tri-Basin NRD directors make better informed decisions about our groundwater supplies and discern trends in the water levels. Those trends prompted Tri-Basin NRD directors to enforce groundwater pumping limits in Union Township in Gosper County in 2009 in an effort to protect the declining groundwater supply there. The 2012 data from dedicated observation wells in Union Township shows that groundwater levels have been steadily increasing since the pumping limits were enforced.

In 2012, Tri-Basin NRD completed a streamflow augmentation project on North Dry Creek, a tributary of the Platte River, in Kearney County. The project involved the construction of a well that will use groundwater to augment streamflows of North Dry Creek. The purpose of the project is to help the State of Nebraska fulfill its commitment to the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program to reduce shortages to Platte River flow targets by offsetting impacts to Platte streamflows resulting from post-July 1, 1997 water uses within Tri-Basin NRD.

Staff at Tri-Basin NRD also monitor the quality of groundwater in the district. In 2012, TBNRD staff took 242 samples from irrigation wells, which were tested for nitrates and pesticides.

Chemigation, the process of applying chemicals through irrigation systems, is permitted and overseen by Tri-Basin NRD staff to assure proper application of the chemicals. The district issued 149 new chemigation permits and 1502 renewals in 2012. District staff inspected safety devices on 575 center pivots in 2012, insuring that groundwater supplies are protected from contamination by fertilizer and ag chemicals.

Rural residents in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties need to know whether they have safe drinking water. The district offers a program that allows rural residents to have their household drinking water tested for nitrates and bacteria free of charge once a year.

## ***Conservation Cost-Share Assistance***

Tri-Basin NRD provides or administers cost-share funds for well decommissioning, soil moisture sensors, irrigation well flowmeters, conservation tree plantings and conversion of irrigated cropland to dryland cropland and grassland. In fiscal year 2011-2012, Tri-Basin NRD approved \$34,215.86 in local funding for conservation tree planting cost-share and \$83,543.91 in state-funded NSWCP cost-share funds for other conservation practices.

## ***Managing Financial Resources Wisely***

TBNRD's total operating expense budget for July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 is \$1,146,617.72 with the levy set at 0.036981 per \$100 valuation. An owner of a house valued at \$100,000 will pay just \$36.98 in 2012 to protect this area's natural resources. This year's levy is slightly higher than the FY 2011-12 levy, which was 3.604 cents per \$100 of valuation.

## ***Planting Trees for Future Generations***

Each year, Tri-Basin NRD offers conservation trees and shrubs for sale for windbreak and habitat plantings. In 2012, 5,544 trees and shrubs were planted and 3,400 trees and shrubs were sold for hand-planting. Tri-Basin NRD also provides free tree seedlings for several educational events and for local Arbor Day celebrations. The district distributed nearly 1000 free trees to district residents in 2012. Tri-Basin staff also help landowners diagnose tree diseases and fungal blights and decide on treatment methods.



## ***Educating and Informing Local Residents***

Tri-Basin NRD sponsors several educational events, for both youth and adults. Each winter, Tri-Basin NRD joins Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce and UNL Extension to host the Holdrege Water Conference. At this event, agricultural producers and agri-business professionals gather to discuss current water issues relevant to the TBNRD area.

Other adult information and education programs include Nitrogen Management classes for agricultural producers and the weekly Natural Resources Report on KRVN 880 radio station.

In September, Tri-Basin NRD holds the Rainwater Basin Conservation Day for eighth grade students at Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area. About 200 students attend this event each year to learn about geology, wetlands, soils, trees and wildlife. Tri-Basin also helps sponsor the Water Jamboree for area fifth grade students, held every April at Harlan County Reservoir. All aspects of water conservation are presented in hands-on sessions to the approximately 500 students who attend this event. In addition, in 2012 Tri-Basin NRD sponsored the Southwest Area Land Judging Contest and the Regional Range Judging Contest. Each contest involved over 250 area high school students.

## 2011 Active Irrigation Wells

County	Total Number of Irrigation Wells	Certified Irrigated Acres
Kearney County	2,108	227,874.48
Phelps County	2,156	257,355.18
Gosper County	739	93,516.36
Total	5,003	578,746.02
Basin	Total Number of Irrigation Wells	Certified Irrigated Acres
Republican Basin	1,595	189,436.27
Platte Basin	2,582	298,433.33
Little Blue Basin	826	90,876.42
Total	5,003	578,746.02

## Republican Basin Water Use\*

Irrigation System	2008	2009	2010	2011
Pivots	6.88	7.11	5.05	6.63
Gravity	11.79	12.42	8.62	10.86
Pivot/Gravity	8.06	7.79	5.31	7.20
Overall Avg.	8.26	8.36	5.82	7.57

\*All Republican Basin irrigation wells are metered. Metered water use is also reported from 464 wells in the Platte and Little Blue Basins. Data updated February 1, 2012.

**Check out our website at  
[www.tribasinncrd.org](http://www.tribasinncrd.org)!**

## TBNRD Staff to Inspect Meters

With irrigation season over, Tri-Basin NRD staff are beginning annual irrigation meter inspections. Each year, NRD staff inspect and take readings from meters in about one-third of the townships in the District.

This year we will be doing inspections in the following townships: Kearney County: Grant (5N-13W), May (6N-13W) and Eaton (7N-13W); Phelps County: Lake (5N-17W), Divide (6N-17W), Anderson (7N-17W) and Cottonwood West (8N-17W); Gosper County: Union (5N-22W), Highland (5N-21W), Lincoln (6N-21W), Harrison (7N-21W) and Robb (8N-21W).

If you have irrigation wells in these townships and you put your meters in storage for the winter, you can call the Tri-Basin NRD office at 1-877-995-6688 to schedule an inspection. If there is no meter at the site when TBNRD staff come to inspect, you will receive a letter requesting access to the meter for inspection.



## Bilka Serving TBNRD Sub-District 4

Joe Bilka of Holdrege was appointed to fill out a Tri-Basin NRD board vacancy in Sub-District 4 at the June board of directors meeting. Joe works for Adam Seeds Company of Holdrege and also farms in Phelps, Chase, and Dundy Counties. He and his wife, Lyndsey, have two children: Averi, age 4 and Hadli, age 2. Joe is a member of Pheasants Forever and the Future Fund. He enjoys hunting and spending time with friends and family.



# Reminder to Chemigators

**Remember to drain your main line check valve to prevent freezing. This will extend the life of the check valve and may help prevent check valve failure.**

***Thank you for your cooperation!***



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# Tri-Basin Topics

Non-Profit Permit  
U. S. Postage  
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Holdrege, NE 68949  
Permit No. 220

**Tri-Basin Natural Resources District**  
1723 Burlington St. Holdrege, NE 68949  
(308) 995-6688  
email: [tribasin@tribasinprd.org](mailto:tribasin@tribasinprd.org)  
[www.tribasinprd.org](http://www.tribasinprd.org)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*Nebraska's NRDs: Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future*

# CALENDAR

November 6..... Election Day

November 12..... NRD Closed for Veteran's Day

November 13.....NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.\*

November 21-22.....NRD Closed for Thanksgiving

December 11..... NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.

December 24-25.....NRD Closed for Christmas

December 31-Jan. 1.....NRD Closed for New Year's

\* Times are tentative. All meetings are at TBNRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.

### TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- David Nickel, Chairman ..... Kearney, NE
- David Olsen, Vice Chairman ..... Minden, NE
- Todd Garrelts, Treasurer ..... Holdrege, NE
- Bradley Lundeen, Secretary ..... Wilcox, NE
- Brian Bergstrom ..... Axtell, NE
- Joe Bilka ..... Holdrege, NE
- Ed Harris ..... Loomis, NE
- Phyllis Johnson ..... Bertrand, NE
- Joe Larson ..... Loomis, NE
- David Nelson ..... Upland, NE
- David Raffety ..... Kearney, NE
- Larry Reynolds ..... Lexington, NE
- Ray Winz ..... Holdrege, NE

### TRI-BASIN NRD STAFF

- John Thorburn ..... General Manager
- Charles Brooks ..... Land Resources Coordinator
- Carie Lynch ..... Administrative Secretary
- Nolan Little ..... Water Resources Manager
- Brett Beinke ..... Water Resources Technician
- Alex Hasenauer ..... Land Resources Technician
- Tammy Fahrenbruch ..... Office Manager
- Esther Smith ..... Office Clerk
- Nicole Salisbury ..... Information & Education Coordinator
- Destinee Steinke ..... Data Entry Clerk
- Jeff VanEperen ..... Seasonal Field Technician
- Ruth Nielsen ..... Minden Office Secretary
- Lori Hagan ..... Elwood Office Secretary
- Tami Reese ..... Holdrege Office Secretary

A mailing list is maintained and requests to be placed on the list should be sent to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

***Get Tri-Basin Topics in your inbox instead of your mailbox!***

To request an electronic version of this newsletter, send an email [nsalisbury@tribasinprd.org](mailto:nsalisbury@tribasinprd.org).